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Political 'Warfare' Predicted

By Peter Goodman

STAFF WRITER

CAROL IANNONE, the conservative New York University teacher whose nomination to the National Endowment for the Humanities advisory council was defeated in the Senate Wednesday, predicts further political warfare on what once were considered purely academic subjects.

"We are going to see more battles like this as we try to deal with the radicalization and politicization of the academy and the culture that has taken place over the last couple of decades," Iannone said in a telephone interview from her Manhattan home.

"Now the battles will be worse, because there is more entrenchment," she said. "That's why this one was so ferocious."

Iannone's nomination was defeated

by the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on a 9-8 vote after a brief debate. Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico was the only Democrat to vote in her favor. She was nominated in January to the 26-member National Council, which advises the National Endowment for the Humanities on what programs should get federal grants.

Her views on literature and the arts are considered controversial by many. She has charged, among other things, that several black writers have won major prizes because of their race rather than the quality of their work.

Her nomination was opposed from the outset by several academic organizations, including the Modern Language Association of America, for what they considered her lack of academic qualifications.

NEH chairwoman Lynne Cheney had worked hard to support Iannone, introducing her to the various senators and writing articles in her favor. "Her nomination has raised vital First Amendment issues, and this vote will be widely seen as sanctioning limits on free expression," Cheney said in a statement released after the vote.

But the MLA insisted yesterday that qualification, not viewpoint, was the deciding issue. "As far as the Modern Language Association is concerned, her credentials did not . . . meet the legis-

lative requirement for a record of distinguished service, scholarship and creativity," MLA executive director Phyllis Franklin said yesterday. This was only the second time the MLA had ever objected to a council nomination, she said.

Iannone, who is a part-time NYU faculty member, has not written any books since earning her doctorate a decade ago, and most of her articles have been in general circulation rather than academic journals.

Several senators, including Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), cited the credential issue in voting against her. "Ideology is not the issue. PC [political correctness] is not the issue," Kennedy said in a statement after the vote.

But Iannone claimed that credentials were a smokescreen in an ideological debate: "Instead of an open debate on their disagreement with my views, they hid behind the credentials."

She said that in her discussions with the senators, none had objected to her background but several, including Kennedy, Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), Paul Simon (D-Ill.) and Brock Adams (D-Wash.), raised questions about articles and reviews she had written.

Jacques Barzun, a professor emeritus at Columbia University who supported Iannone's nomination, said, "It

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Carol Iannone

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is possible to gauge academic competence without hundreds of pages and the cloth binding to a book." Based on the half dozen of her essays he has read, Barzun said, he considered her qualified.

He also said, however, that he had been led to believe Iannone was nominated to a lay position on the council, which does not have the same academic requirements as an academic one. Barzun noted the distinction but added, "I don't think my position would have changed." He also said that he had been "driven to the conclusion" that her rejection was for political rather than academic reasons "considering that this was a routine nomination." ■